



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

# NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH – GOVERNOR

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## **Blagojevich administration, Secretary of State team up with Ford and Allstate to launch second year of “Operation Teen Safe Driving”**

***Groundbreaking program contributed to steep drop in teen road fatalities during initial campaign***

**SPRINGFIELD** – Representatives of Governor Rod R. Blagojevich’s administration were joined today by Secretary of State Jesse White and corporate sponsors to kick off the second year of *Operation Teen Safe Driving*. The groundbreaking effort was designed to reduce teen crashes and save lives on Illinois’ roadways and is the first of its kind in the nation.

*Operation Teen Safe Driving* is a statewide initiative spearheaded by the Illinois Department of Transportation’s (IDOT) Division of Traffic Safety. The program is augmented by crucial sponsorships from the Ford Motor Company Fund and the Allstate Foundation and enlists young people to teach safe driving skills to their peers. This program has helped Illinois achieve a dramatic 52 percent reduction in teen road fatalities in the first six months of 2008; fatalities dropped from 82 in the first six months of 2007, to 39 during the same time period this year.

“Teenagers across Illinois have really stepped up and gotten involved in *Operation Teen Safe Driving*,” said Governor Blagojevich. “Thanks to some tough new laws and the efforts of so many young people across the state, we have seen a historic decline in fatal crashes involving teenagers. Now, as we approach a new school year, we want to build on our success and work to save even more young lives.”

*Operation Teen Safe Driving* engages high school students in a competition to design community-based driver safety programs targeted at other teens. It was also designed to work in concert with a series of stringent new laws that took effect in January, which were put forth by a Teen Driving Task Force headed by Secretary of State White.

“Illinois’ strengthened teen driver safety law, which resulted from the recommendation of my Teen Driver Safety Task Force, has been in effect since January 1, 2008 and is having an immediate impact,” said the Secretary of State. “I am encouraged that teen crash fatalities have

dropped from 82 over the first 6 months in 2007 to 39 over the same time period this year. This statewide program will continue to draw even more attention to the issue of teen driving and to the new law by utilizing the creativity of teens to develop effective safe driving messages for their peers.”

A total of 104 high schools participated in the program during the 2007-2008 school year. Among the innovative ideas proposed by students were: holding safe driving poster contests, erecting billboards in locations that have high levels of teen traffic, awarding prizes for safe driving, and holding a demonstration in which students try to drive an obstacle course in a golf cart while text messaging. Students also came up with slogans like: “Everybody on the Road is Somebody’s Loved One,” “Don’t Drive Intoxicated” and “If You Text, You Might be Next.”

*Operation Teen Safe Driving* was modeled on the nationally recognized the Ford Motor Company Fund’s *Driving Skills for Life* high school-based pilot project implemented in 2006 by Ford Motor Company Fund, the Governors Highway Safety Association, IDOT, the Illinois State Police, and local partners that halted an epidemic of 15 teen fatalities in Tazewell County in 2005 and 2006.

“We are greatly pleased to continue our commitment to this important initiative focused on teen safe driving” said Jim Vella, president Ford Fund and Community Services, Ford Motor Company. “The 2008 Operation Teen Safe Driving campaign was a major success and this innovative program continues our ongoing commitment to safety.”

“The Allstate Foundation is proud to be a part of a campaign that has helped to save the lives of so many teens here in Illinois. Our goal is to ensure that we have an even greater impact this year,” said Dave Prendergast, Assistant Vice President, Allstate Insurance Company.

Other state agencies involved in *Operation Teen Safe Driving* include the Illinois State Police (ISP), the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Liquor Control Commission. Also backing the Illinois campaign are national traffic safety groups, including: the Governors Highway Safety Association, RADD (“the Entertainment Industry’s Voice for Road Safety”), and SADD (originally founded as “Students Against Drunk Driving” and now standing for “Students Against Destructive Decisions”).

“Under the leadership of Governor Blagojevich, Illinois has made remarkable progress in increasing safety belt use and reducing traffic fatalities to the lowest level since 1924,” said IDOT Secretary Milton R. Sees. “But, teen drivers account for more than their share of crashes. In 2007, teen drivers made up approximately seven percent of the population but were involved in 16.5 percent of the fatal crashes. *Operation Teen Safe Driving* tackles this problem head-on.”

“The Illinois State Police understands the challenges teenagers face as they begin driving,” said ISP Director Larry G. Trent. “The *Operation Teen Safe Driving* initiative provides an avenue for young drivers to use their creativity and innovation in their schools and community to reduce the number of teen motor vehicle crashes and fatalities.”

One of the leading issues in teen driver safety is underage drinking. The Illinois Liquor Control Commission (ILCC) educates teens, parents and educators about the consequences of teen drinking through its *Don't Be Sorry* public education campaign to reduce underage drinking. The

ILCC offers their resources to the students and schools as they develop their local safe-driving programs.

“IDOT’s Division of Traffic Safety continues to pioneer groundbreaking ways to reduce dangerous behavior behind the wheel by teens,” said Illinois Liquor Control Commission Executive Director Lainie Krozel. “The ILCC is committed to equipping teens with the knowledge, attitude and skills necessary to resist teen drinking. The most effective teen drinking prevention programs encompass coordinated school, family and community efforts. The *Operation Teen Safe Driving* program is an outstanding way to bring those components together and the ILCC is proud to be part of this innovative peer-led program.”

Public and private high schools around the state are encouraged to identify the major teen traffic safety problems in their communities, and to propose creative solutions to those problems. High schools that come up with the most creative solutions will be invited to participate in Ford Motor Company Fund sponsored “Ride and Drive” safe-driving clinics at the end of the school year. These “Ride and Drive” events feature professional drivers giving young drivers rigorous behind the wheel driving exercises, including: Hazard Recognition/Accident Avoidance, Vehicle Handling/Skid Control and Speed/Space Management.

For more information about *Operation Teen Safe Driving* and applications to participate in the effort, go to [www.buckleupillinois.org](http://www.buckleupillinois.org).